

DATE: 29 Oct 73

TO: [REDACTED]

NIO/USSR & EE

FROM:

SUBJECT: The BACKFIRE Bomber and NIE 11-8

REMARKS:

Until we organize the Strategic and Conventional Forces accounts and get the NIOs named to run them, I am going to have to rely heavily on you for guidance on how I should respond to all questions relating to all Soviet matters. Appended is a note from Danny Graham with two tabs which serves up one such question. After you have had a chance to look this package over, I would appreciate your counsel on how I should react.

[REDACTED]

George A. Carver, Jr.
Deputy for National Intelligence Officers

Attachment

DIA review
completed.

USAF review
completed.

23 OCT 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
D/DCI/NIO

SUBJECT: NIE 11-8 and the BACKFIRE Bomber

1. Reference is General Keegan's letter to the DCI of 9 October 1973 concerning community differences regarding the BACKFIRE bomber and its treatment in the forthcoming NIE 11-8-73 (Tab A) and the DCI's reply of 18 October (Tab B).

2. In my view, the BACKFIRE controversy represents the kind of problem which deserves special estimative treatment rather than being subsumed in a major overall estimate such as NIE 11-8. The BACKFIRE, for instance, is one of the elements of military power which is treated in the set of "Key Intelligence Questions" which we now have in final draft.

3. There are several specific matters of very live interest -- of which the BACKFIRE certainly is one -- which should be covered by an estimate devoted solely to the particular problem at issue. Such a single subject estimate can be updated when there is significant new information and not have to wait for the annual revision of an overall estimate such as the NIE 11-8.



Daniel O. Graham
Major General, USA
D/DCI/IC

Attachments:

Tab A
Tab B

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HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.
20330

EO 1.8 73-1179

9 OCT 1973

Honorable William E. Colby
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Mr. Colby

For the past two years NIE 11-8 has reflected differences over the range capabilities and intended mission of the Soviet bomber, the BACKFIRE. The estimates have concluded that no confident assessment of the BACKFIRE capability could be made--and that its intended mission would probably be "peripheral" in nature. During recent months, there has been good progress on accepting its range capability as defined by extensive technical analysis; however, it appears that the issue of judging the intended primary mission of this bomber is still with us.

Significantly, even those who are most skeptical of the assessed range of BACKFIRE acknowledge that, with refueling, it has a range of at least 6,000 NM. This clearly places the BACKFIRE in a range class with the BISON heavy jet bomber.

My own view is that the Soviets will likely use the BACKFIRE for a great variety of tasks--as they have the BADGER, BEAR, and BISON--without any one being primary. There is no tangible basis for judging one mission as primary because of the suitability of this versatile aircraft for many roles. I believe that it would be prudent not to speculate at this time about primary and secondary missions, and would hope that we can eliminate inconsistencies in NIE 11-8-73 regarding the intercontinental capability of BACKFIRE.

Warmest regards

George J. Keegan, Jr.
GEORGE J. KEEGAN, JR.
Director General, USAF
Chief of Staff, Intelligence

Classified by AGS/1, HQ USAF
SUBJECT TO GENERAL
DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE
OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTHORITY OF 25 USC 552
AT THE TIME OF REVIEW
DECLASSIFIED
31 JANUARY 1981

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Cy to: SecDef (Mr. Schlesinger)
SAF/OS (Dr. McLucas)
ASD/I (Dr. Hall)
OSD/DDR&E (Dr. Currie)
AF/CC (Gen Brown)
CINCSAC (Gen Meyer)
AFSC/CC (Gen Phillips)
DIA/DR (V/Adm de Poix)
NSA (Lt Gen Allen)
OASD/I (Mr. Parker)
CIA/ONE STAT

73-649113



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D. C.
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

18 OCT 1973

Major General George J. Keegan, Jr., USAF
Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence
Department of the Air Force
Headquarters United States Air Force
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear General Keegan,

Thank you for the thoughts expressed in your letter of 9 October on the BACKFIRE bomber. I am circulating the letter to those here concerned with NIE 11-8-73 and am confident that the BACKFIRE problem, and your views regarding it, will be thoroughly considered in preparation and coordination of the Estimate.

Sincerely,

W. E. Colby

W. E. Colby

ONE: 16 Oct 73

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W. E. Colby